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BATTLE BEING WAGED ON MILITARY POLICY

Secretary Weinberger's Slow Start in Taking Control of Pentagon Is Seen Fueling Struggle

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 24 — A many-sided tug-of-war over military policy has broken out within the Reagan Administration, according to officials in the Pentagon, on Capitol Hill and in the White House.

The conflict, the officials said, has sharpened largely because the new Secretary of Defense, Caspar W. Weinberger, and his closest associates have been slow to take control.

Struggles such as this are commonplace among newcomers to power in Washington, but this one appears to be the most complex of the new Administration.

Mr. Weinberger, a former Federal budget director, has been preoccupied with advising the new President on the budget and economic policy, according to Reagan officials. In addition, they said, he has been hampered because he expended much political capital by insisting on naming Frank C. Carlucci, a longtime associate, as Deputy Secretary, despite objections from influential Reagan supporters.

Lag in Selecting Staff

For those reasons, plus his acknowledged lack of familiarity with military issues, Mr. Weinberger has lagged in getting control of the budget process in the Pentagon that will determine much of military policy for the next year. He has also fallen behind in naming his team to take charge of the complicated military and civilian bureaucracy in the Pentagon, based on standards that Mr. Reagan set after his election when he promised that his Administration would "hit the ground running."

In addition, Mr. Carlucci, who was the Deputy Director of Central Intelligence in the Carter Administration, has continued as acting director of the Central Intelligence Agency, which has distracted him from his work in the Pentagon.

The consequent delay, according to the officials, has permitted other centers of power on military issues to emerge. Among those involved in this struggle are Senator John G. Tower, Republican of Texas, the new chairman of the Armed

Services Committee; conservatives led by Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina; Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig Jr., and staff officials of the National Security Council such as William R. Van Cleave, as well as other White House officials.

Mr. Haig, the new Secretary of State, put his imprint on the Administration's foreign policy swiftly despite Democrats' attacks on him at Senate confirmation hearings.

Tower's Expanding Influence

Senator Tower was a surrogate for Mr. Reagan on military issues in the campaign and has continued to advise the new President. He moved quickly early this month to give his subcommittees a stronger voice in overseeing the Pentagon. His own staff has prepared proposed changes in the current military budget as well as the next one.

Next week he plans to hold hearings, at which Mr. Weinberger was scheduled to testify, on the nation's military posture. He has set Feb. 5 as the informal deadline for completing those hearings and on nominations for the senior staff in the Pentagon, and Feb. 23 for beginning hearings on the budget.

The Senator has said he wants to add \$11 billion to \$14 billion to the current military budget, while Mr. Weinberger is looking for ways to hold the increase to the \$6.3 billion, as proposed by his predecessor, Harold Brown.

Senator Helms vigorously opposed Mr. Weinberger's confirmation on the Senate floor. His expressed views parallel many of those held by Mr. Reagan's still formidable "kitchen cabinet" of California businessmen, who have accused Mr. Weinberger of being unfaithful to campaign pledges to put heavy muscle into the military. Mr. Helms has vowed to try to block the confirmation of Mr. Carlucci, who has been accused by some conservatives of having helped to weaken the Central Intelligence Agency by cutting back on covert operations and dismissing experienced people.

Move to Oust Chief of Staff

Senator Helms has also asserted that he will seek to have President Reagan dismiss Gen. David C. Jones, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, for having supported former President Carter's military policies. That move seems certain to set off a bitter fight, unless Mr. Weinberger sacrifices General Jones.

Mr. Van Cleave, who will serve under Richard V. Allen on the staff of the National Security Council, had led a transition team on military policy and planned to give the new Secretary recommendations on budget revisions and staffing of the Pentagon on Jan. 20.

Mr. Weinberger's abrupt dismissal of Mr. Van Cleave and his team in December took the steam out of that effort. More important, Mr. Van Cleave had expected to take a senior position in the Pentagon from which he could influence military policy. Administration sources say he seems certain to try that from the White House now.

In addition, Mr. Weinberger has had disputes with other White House officials over his insistence on naming his choices for his senior subordinates in the Pentagon, rather than Reagan loyalists.

Still, officials, friends and others who have known Mr. Weinberger since his earlier incarnations in Washington as Director of the Office of Management and Budget and as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare asserted that his ability to take control should not be underestimated. Both he and Mr. Carlucci, they said, are "quick studies" who can master complicated issues swiftly.

Those who know Mr. Weinberger said he had demonstrated considerable political skill in bureaucratic infighting. Finally, everyone agreed, Mr. Weinberger's unquestioned source of power is his long and close relationship with President Reagan, a relationship that so far has not been weakened by the struggle here.